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The Bible in the Sunday School.

SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT IN SUNDAY SCHOOL WORK

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I. *The real purpose of Sunday School work.* To lead the pupils to a knowledge of the essential contents of the Bible, to the end that they may become efficient members of Christ's kingdom. In doing this they will find moral and spiritual blessing for themselves, they will become forces for righteousness in the community, and will inherit eternal life.

II. *Some of the difficulties that present themselves* in attempting to obtain such knowledge as will produce these results: (1) The brief time obtainable for covering such a large amount of material. (2) The difficulty of placing one's self in touch with the life and thought of past nations. (3) The fact that we have been able to place so little emphasis upon the adequate preparation of teachers for so great a responsibility. (4) The want of inclination to careful study on the part of pupils. They do not feel the same compulsion as in the secular school, and the heart is not naturally attracted to religious truth.

III. *Defects in the present system.* (1) Want of unity; we have isolated facts rather than presented a natural unfolding of the thought. (2) As a result the pupil's conception of truth is often narrow and superficial, and sometimes entirely false. Instead of trusting the writer's order, we have chosen texts from every writer and formed mosaics of our own design. Prejudiced men, assuming this right, have made the Bible teach any doctrine or any heresy even that they pleased. (3) In choosing texts or select passages we have ignored whole sections of the Bible, and sometimes the very portions which were necessary to the interpretation of our favorite passages. In moral teachings, as also in doctrine, pupils have often been limited to a narrow range. Platitudes have taken the place of broad and inspiring views of truth. We have been dealing with the facts of history rather than with the philosophy of the facts. (4) The defects are proved by the results. With all the moralizing and doctrinal teaching, we are deplorably lacking in ethical culture, while it is rare to find a pupil who has any clear idea of even the vital principles of salvation.

IV. *Other characteristics of an ideal system.* (1) Divide the Bible into the five great periods, giving one year to each, the following order and division is suggested: (a) The Life of Christ, from the Harmony of the Four Gospels.

(*b*) The Early Church, or the Acts and Writings of the Apostles. (*c*) The Beginning of the Jewish Nation, from the Story of Creation to the Settlement in Canaan. (*d*) From the Settlement in Canaan to the Glory of the Kingdom. (*e*) From the Division of the Kingdom to the Return from Captivity. A pupil may thus cover the course three times between the ages of five and twenty. (2) Let each period tell its own story in its natural order. As the beauties of nature or the glory of the heavens must ever appeal to man more strongly than the highest representations in art, so let the truth itself appeal to the mind of the pupil. We shall have found the ideal system when we can lead the pupil to *live over* a given period of history. Interest will then be awakened, and all the desired results will follow. To this end, subject, incident, or argument must be presented as a whole, with every part in logical relationship. One of the greatest needs with the average pupil is a careful analysis of the thought. (3) Let the notes of explanation be enlivening and enlightening, *i. e.*, let them place the pupil back in the day in which the events belong. Where there is difference of opinion, let two or three of the best views be presented, leaving the pupil room for the exercise of his own judgment. Let the main purpose be to suggest rather than to limit thought. (4) In the several "Inductive" series now in use, I believe we have started in the right direction; following out this line, correcting, developing, perfecting, the ideal system will yet be evolved. It is clearly the only true way to study the Bible; the only way to awaken interest; it is natural, historic, scientific; by it one catches the same spirit that inspired the writer; it is the only method that honors the Bible as the word of God. By the old system we drink after the water has run through the conduit of man's interpretation; by the Inductive system one is brought to the fountain itself.